

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 USSS-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
-----181821 098370 /43

O 181710Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9979

S E C R E T BOGOTA 01605

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEC, PINS, CASC, CO
SUBJECT: KIDNAPPING OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

REF: STATE 036923

1. EMBASSY AGREES WITH DEPT'S POSITION THAT PEACE CORPS SHOULD APPEAR TO BE OUT IN FRONT IN COLOMBIA AS WELL AS IN WASHINGTON. WE HAVE BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR HERE AND HAVE FULL CONFIDENCE IN HIS ABILITY TO DISCHARGE THIS SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, HE ALREADY HAS TECHNICAL MEANS FOR RECORDING ANY CONTACT FROM THE KIDNAPPERS RECEIVED EITHER AT HIS OFFICE OF HIS HOME.

2. EMBASSY ESTIMATES, HOWEVER, THAT THE FARC WILL BE MORE INCLINED TO CONTACT THE EMBASSY FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRESENTING THEIR DEMANDS. SHOULD SUCH A CONTACT BE MADE, TO THE EMBASSY, WE WOULD INTEND TO MAKE A VERY CAREFUL EFFORT TO REFER THE FARC TO THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR. WE MIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE, SUGGEST THAT THEY CONTACT HIM NEXT OR WE COULD SAY THAT WE WILL PASS THE FARC MESSAGE TO THE PC DIRECTOR FOR RESPONSE BY HIM. WE WOULD NEED TO BE VERY CAREFUL, HOWEVER, TO
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AVOID GIVING THE FARC THE IMPRESSION THAT THE EMBASSY WAS ATTEMPTING TO DEFLECT OR EVADE DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE FARC. IN OTHER WORDS, WE WOULD NOT WANT THE FARC TO INFER THAT WE ARE NECESSARILY REACTING NEGATIVELY TO THEIR APPROACH BY REFERRING THEM TO THE PEACE CORPS.

3. TO INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE FARC WOULD ADOPT

A PRACTICE OF CONTACTING THE PEACE CORPS, WE RECOMMEND THAT THE PRIVATE MESSAGE SUGGESTED IN PARA 5 OF REFTEL BE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE PEACE CORPS HERE. (HE IS NOW PREPARING A DRAFT BASED ON THE OUTLINE CONTAINED AT THE END OF PARA 5 OF REFTEL.) FRANKLY, WE ESTIMATE THAT THERE IS ONLY A SLIGHT CHANCE THAT THE FARC WOULD RESPOND POSITIVELY TO THIS TYPE OF HUMANITARIAN MESSAGE. NONETHELESS, THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A RESPONSE

CANNOT BE RULED OUT. MOREOVER, WE PERCEIVE NO RISK OR DISADVANTAGE IN SUCH A MOVE AND THEREFORE THINK IT SHOULD BE MADE.

4. AT PRESENT WE HAVE NO PRIVATE CHANNEL TO THE FARC BUT THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT SUCH A CHANNEL CAN BE ESTABLISHED. IF SO, WE THINK THIS WOULD BE THE BEST MEANS FOR TRANSMITTING PC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE. WE WILL BE REPORTING FURTHER ON THIS POSSIBILITY AND WILL OF COURSE TAKE NO STEPS WITHOUT WASHINGTON'S EXPLICIT APPROVAL.

5. SHOULD WE NOT BE ABLE TO DEVELOP THIS PRIVATE CHANNEL, WE THINK THAT A FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE FOR THE PC DIRECTOR TO GIVE HIS MESSAGE TO THE COLOMBIAN COMMUNIST PARTY HERE FOR TRANSMISSION TO THE FARC. (PCC MAY OF COURSE DECLINE TO DO THIS.) WE AGREE THAT WE SHOULD INFORM AND SEEK CONCURRENCE OF THE GOC FOR ANY SUCH APPROACH TO THE FARC; HOWEVER, IF WE USE A PRIVATE CLANDESTINE CHANNEL WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY
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OUR INTERMEDIARY TO THE GOC.

6. WITH REFERENCE TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN PARA 9 OF REFTEL, WE ESTIMATE THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF COLOMBIA EXERCISES SIGNIFICANT, THOUGH PROBABLY NOT TOTAL, CONTROL OVER THE FARC. A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PARTY IS THE SECOND-RANKING OFFICIAL OF FARC AND ITS POLITICAL COMMANDER. WE FEEL THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF COLOMBIA RECOGNIZES THAT THE GOC MIGHT TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE PARTY ORGANIZATION AND/OR ITS SENIOR MEMBERS IN REPRISAL FOR FARC TERRORISM. THIS FACTOR UNDOUBTEDLY ENTERS INTO THE PARTY'S TACTICAL RISK CALCULATIONS. CONSEQUENTLY IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF COLOMBIA MIGHT FACILITATE THE RELEASE OF STARR BY THE FARC IF IT FELT SUFFICIENTLY ALARMED THAT THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE PROMPTED TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE PARTY. WE THINK THEREFORE THAT WE SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER APPROACHING THE GOC AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL IN AN EFFORT TO BRING SUCH PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE PARTY.

WE CANNOT OF COURSE GUARANTEE THAT SUCH A MOVE BY US WOULD AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCE THE EFFECT WE DESIRE BECAUSE BOTH THE GOC AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY WOULD HAVE A VARIETY OF DOMESTIC FACTORS TO ASSESS IN DECIDING ON A COURSE OF ACTION. (WE MIGHT EVEN CONSIDER AN APPROACH TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY THROUGH THE SOVIETS THOUGH WE RECOGNIZE, OF COURSE, THAT THIS WOULD ENTAIL CONSIDERATION OF FACTORS AND INTERESTS GOING BEYOND THE SITUATION HERE IN COLOMBIA.)

7. WE DO NOT SEE AN EFFECTIVE ROLE IN THIS PROBLEM FOR PRIVATE PERSONAGES OR INSTITUTIONS IN OR OUTSIDE OF COLOMBIA. WE HAVE HOWEVER APPROACHED THE HEAD OF INDERENA, THE INSTITUTE FOR WHICH STAFF WAS WORKING, TO GET HIS ASSISTANCE IN PUTTING DOWN THE STORY IN EL BOGOTANO THAT STARR WAS WITH THE CIA. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT INDERENA COULD BE OF FURTHER USE IN THIS CASE AND

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WE WILL GIVE CONTINUED CONSIDERATION TO THIS POSSIBILITY.
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